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HOUSEKEEPERS' CHAT

Monday, April 6, 1931.

(NOT FOR PUBLICATION)

Subject: "Headache Remedies." Information from the Food and Drug Administration, U. S. D. A.

I stopped in at my Next-Door Neighbor's yesterday morning, stepped through the kitchen door and called for her.

"In here," answered a faint voice from the bedroom, "In here, and step softly, please. I've got a miserable headache, Aunt Sammy. Most miserable."

There she was, right eyebrow pointing north-northeast and twitching feebly when a loose board squeaked under my foot, perpendicular furrow between the brows, and all the other signals of a raging headache.

I put on my best bedside cheer-up manner and suggested that she apply for a job as a laboratory subject in the investigation of headache that the papers say some Chicago scientists are carrying on.

"I wish them luck," she groaned, "but what I want right now is relief. Sozobow, though; I sort of shrink from doping too much for a headache. What shall I do?"

Being blessed with good health and freedom from headaches, I couldn't suggest anything special out of my own experience, so I made my neighbor as comfortable as I could with some cold compresses, opened her window wide to give her fresh air and left her to fight it out with Old Man Migraine.

Yesterday evening one of the men from the Federal Food and Drug Administration office stopped in for chess with Uncle Ebenezer. Before they got absorbed in their funny pastime, I collared Bill, the Food and Drugs man. I told him about my Next-Door-Neighbor's headache.

"How about headache medicines?" I asked him. "I know the law gives you people something to do with them. Now tell me in words of not more than two syllables. You know I don't always understand those fourteen-dollar words you use from the big book Pharmako-what-you-call-it book."

Bill insisted that I allow him a dozen fourteen-dollar words. I agreed. Then he said, "You really have to know some of those long names for drugs



before you can understand about headache remedies. Your Next-Door Neighbor and all the other people troubled with those blinding torments have to learn some names of drugs before they can know just what they are letting themselves in for by becoming habitual users of headache pills, powders, or potions.

"Here's a good starting point for my lecture. The Federal food and drugs act requires that any medicinal preparation containing any alcohol, morphine, opium, cocaine, heroin, alpha or beta eucaine, chloroform, cannabis indica, chloral hydrate, or acetanilid -- or any derivatives of such substances -- must carry a label which states the quantity or the proportion of content of these drugs contained in a preparation.

"And of course, Aunt Sammy, you want to know why. A woman always wants to know why. So I'll tell you.

"The law requires the presence of these drugs in any medicine to be stated because, for one thing, they are habit-forming. The law does not require the manufacturer to warn the consumer that these drugs are potentially dangerous. It assumes that the consumer has this knowledge. So, Aunt Sammy, tell your friend to memorize that list of drugs if she wants to know what she may be buying in the way of future trouble along with headache preparations.

"Headache remedies, so-called, often contain one or more of these dangerous drugs. Frequently it will be acetanilid. Or it may be phenacetin, ~~the~~ a derivative of acetanilid. If present, the names of either of these will be declared on the label of the headache preparation.

"Now you want to know why these drugs are used in headache preparations, if they are dangerous. Well, they are used because they dull the sensibility to pain of the person taking them. Get that, Aunt Sammy. They don't remove the cause of the pain. They simply put your nerves for awhile in such a state that they don't respond to the pain so quickly. For temporary relief from pain, such drugs have value. Some other drugs have this same property, but the law does not require them to be declared on the label, so we won't name them.

"Anyhow, all of the drugs that deaden your sensibility to pain you can put under the general head of anodynes. Anodynes are the drugs most commonly used in headache preparations. But some preparations represented as cures for headaches are simply laxatives. They may actually relieve headaches -- if the cause of the headache is a temporary constipation. Then there is a third type of headache preparation, containing an antacid, such as sodium bicarbonate or milk of magnesia. Of course they will give relief only if the headache results from excessive acidity of the stomach secretions. A fourth type combines drugs of the three classes I have already named. And finally, there is a fifth class of headache preparations that you might call counterirritants. I mean such things as liniments, plasters, salves, hot and cold compresses. You apply them externally. The idea is to speed up circulation of the blood in the parts where you apply them. Sometimes they give temporary relief from a headache."





"Well, I think I follow you so far, Bill," I told him. "I remember that there are five classes of headache preparations. The first class is anodynes. And anodynes may contain some drugs that are dangerous because they are habit-forming and depress heart action. I remember headache remedies give temporary relief from pain, and that's often a real boon to sufferers. But the medicines don't get at the cause of persistent headaches. What of it?"

"Just this, Aunt Sammy," Bill answered, a trifle impatiently as he saw Uncle Ebenezer pattering over the chess board. "Just this. Tell your Next-Door Neighbor, and any other friends bothered by headaches to paste these facts in their hats as guides to self-doctoring for headaches:

"Headache remedies, as you said, simply relieve the pain temporarily. They do not eradicate the cause. A headache can result from any one of a number of causes: head injury, eye strain, gastro-intestinal disturbances, nervous disorders. Headaches may be the initial symptom of more serious disease. When you depend upon a headache remedy for relief from recurring attacks you may be obscuring or masking important symptoms of disease. That may result in dangerous delay in beginning proper treatment for the disease.

"If your headache is caused by eye strain, you had better see an oculist. If it is caused by lack of rest, take a nap. If it is caused by working in dimly lighted or poorly ventilated rooms or by other external conditions, correct those conditions. If your sleeping room is improperly ventilated, provide more fresh air. That may ward off headaches. If your headache is caused by intestinal trouble or nervous disorders or any one of a dozen or more maladies which should be treated at the source, then see your physician, for you will rely at your peril upon temporary relief."

"Bill," I said, "it's nice of you to give me all this free advice and information. But I can't remember it to repeat to my Next-Door Neighbor. Maybe I never have headaches because my skull is so thick. But can't you give me this written out so I can hand it to the suffering lady?"

"Not exactly, Aunt Sammy," Bill answered, edging toward the chess table. "But I'll let you have a couple of copies of a mimeographed statement on headache remedies put out by the Food and Drug Administration. I'll make it a dozen if you'll give Ebenezer and me the "Go" sign on this chess game. I'll even try to supply your radio listeners."

"Fine, Bill." I gave him my benediction. "I won't say a word for the first three hours of your silly game."

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We'll have to be spry or we won't get in our menu today. What? A Monday chat without menu? That just wouldn't do.

Let's start with hard cooked eggs cut up and served on toast with hot tomato sauce; then, Hashed browned potatoes; Buttered spinach; Crisp celery and for dessert, Rhubarb pie. What about using up in this menu those hard cooked





Easter eggs that the children had colored in blues, pinks and purples yesterday? An economical idea -- if the coloring used was harmless and if the eggs haven't been pretty well demolished by the day's play.

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Tomorrow: "Painless Housecleaning."

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